

Anger as Executive-funded survey says addicts can avoid health problems

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claims univ ersity study



DRINK GAFFE: Jack McConnell



WARNING: Shona Robison

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HEROIN can be harmless if it is used in a controlled fashion, experts claimed in a controversial report published yesterday.

The research, funded by taxpayers, claimed addicts can abuse the class A drug and still hold down a normal life at the same time.

It said the highly addictive and potentially lethal substance did not always lead to the rapid downward spiral portrayed in movies such as *Trainspotting*.

The report by Glasgow Caledonian University found long-term junkies were able to hold down jobs and pass exams if they exercised self-control and smoked the drug rather than injecting.

It also found almost three quarters (76 per cent) of addicts who had been using heroin for seven years did not suffer any drug-related health problems.

But opposition politicians and anti-drugs campaigners dismissed the £14,000 project, funded by the Scottish Executive, and warned that it was misleading.

SNP health spokeswoman Shona Robison said: "Heroin has a dramatic impact on individuals concerned, especially when you take into account the heroin-related crime many use to feed their habit."

"Heroin has devastated communities across Scotland and any attempt to normalise heroin use is not helpful."

The survey was published after model Kate Moss was begged by pals to dump her heroin-addict lover, troubled rock star Pete Doherty, because they feared he would drag her down, and just days after First Minister Jack McConnell told schoolchildren: "By all

By Mike MacEachern

means get drunk once in a while." There are around 55,000 problematic heroin users in Scotland, but the report, commissioned by the Scottish Executive's chief scientist office, said that ongoing problems with heroin were "rare".

Forty-eight per cent of users described their health as "good" with only seven per cent describing it as "bad" or "fairly bad". Most of the 126 long-term users from the Glasgow area, a third of whom looked after children, were satisfied with their physical health. Only one of the addicts reported the break-up of a long-term relationship.

'You have to take into account crimes people commit to feed habits'

Dr David Shewan, co-director of the Centre for the Study of Violence at Glasgow Caledonian University, said the drug was not always an ingredient for destruction.

He said: "The chemical properties of specific substances, including heroin, should not be assumed to inevitably lead to addictive and destructive patterns of drug use."

A spokesman for the Scottish Executive insisted the research had helped to piece together the bigger picture of heroin abuse in Scotland.

He said: "We take note of all studies. This research adds to a small body of evidence that suggests there might be a place for prescribed heroin to a small number of addicts who do not respond to all other forms of treatment."

Sheriff wants drug count

A JUDGE has called for help in dealing with the menace of drug-upped drivers.

Sheriff Lindsay Foulis wants courts to be told, just how badly-impaired drivers were at the time. He told Perth Sheriff Court that this would bring drug drivers in line with drink drivers, who are subject to a blood alcohol reading.

Sheriff Foulis had just fined drug driver James Houston, 28, £75 with an 18 month ban, after he admitted swerving dangerously in Perth on February 6 last year. The Sheriff said: "It would be handy if the police surgeons indicated what level of impairment they considered a suspect had."



Plea: Sheriff Foulis

REHAB: Rock singer Pete Doherty, boyfriend of Kate Moss, has been struggling to control his heroin addiction

